DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 091 051 PS 007 121

AUTHOR Hoffman, Lois Wladis
TITLE The Professional Woman as Mother.
INSTITUTION Michigan Univ., Ann Arbor. Dept. of Psychology.
PUB DATE May 72
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Conference on Successful Women in the Sciences (New York, New York, May 1972); Developmental Program, Report No. 21

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.75 HC-$1.50 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS *Job Satisfaction; Literature Reviews; *Mother Attitudes; *Parent Child Relationship; *Self Concept; Sex Differences; Socioeconomic Influences; Work Attitudes; *Working Women
IDENTIFIERS Guilt; Sex Role Expectation

ABSTRACT

This conference address on the question of the professional woman as mother focuses on the effects of a career on mothering, the effects of mothering on a career, and the effects of combining these two roles on a professional woman's personal satisfactions. The research indicates that when the working mother likes her work, she often seems to feel guilty and tends to compensate for this in her relationship with her children. Although there is little research on mothering and careers, much of the existing research may become increasingly obsolete due to recent changes in sex role expectations. Data collected eary year on incoming freshmen at colleges and universities show that younger women who will pursue careers have values, self-concepts, and expectations quite different from those pointed out in earlier studies. Research results also reflect a growing change in men's orientations toward household tasks, child care, and career commitment. (CS)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

ED 091051

THE PROFESSIONAL WOMAN AS MOTHER

Lois Wladis Hoffman, Ph.D.

University of Michigan

PS 007121

Report #21, Developmental Program, Department of Psychology

University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48104, December, 1972.

Prepared for the Conference on Successful Women in the Sciences, New York Academy of Sciences, New York, New York, May 11-13, 1972.

THE PROFESSIONAL WOMAN AS MOTHER

Lois Wladis Hoffman, Ph.D.

University of Michigan

In talking about the professional woman as mother, one could deal with the effects of the career on her mothering, the effects of motherhood on her career, or the effects of combining these two roles on her personal satisfactions. Most of my focus will be on the first: what kind of a mother is she and how have her children turned out. But let me discuss the other two briefly, for they provide an important context for my major points.

The dysfunctions of motherhood for the pursuit of a career have been pointed out by Bailyn (1964), Epstein (1971), White (1970) and others. We are handicapped in our career advancement by geographical restrictions, family obligations, guilt, and prejudice. The husband's career considerations have been given priorities not only because of his insistence, but also because of our acquiescence. We have been assigned, and we have accepted, the major responsibility for child care and the household operations. As Rossi (1971) has indicated, some men also have not pursued their careers with single-minded devotion, but have allowed their family concerns to temper their ambitions. But this is far more true for women. Furthermore, women have had that mixed blessing--the chance to drop out without censure. We have all returned from a bad day at work to a chaotic household and wondered why we ever left the kitchen. We are harassed, overworked, and in desperate need of a housekeeper.

But for all of this, we may have fared better with respect to personal satisfactions than had we chosen one of the alternative paths that were available. This is not to say that there is no room for improvement, but the life that includes a commitment to the several roles--wife, mother, and professional--may be the richest of all. There are a number of recent empirical studies that indicate that despite all of the difficulties, the bright and educated women who have combined all three look back with considerable satisfaction and a minimum of regrets (Birnbaum, 1971; Garland, 1972; Ginsberg, 1971; Poloma, 1972). Birnbaum, for example,

compared a group of mothers who were also faculty members of a large university, with unmarried faculty women, and with a group of mothers who had graduated from college with honors but had pursued neither further education nor a career. The groups were comparable with respect to age--mainly in their early forties. Of the three groups, the nonworking mothers were the ones with the lowest self-esteem and the lowest sense of personal competence, including even sense of competence about child care skills. These women also felt least attractive, expressed most concern over self-identity issues, and most often indicated feelings of loneliness. The subjects were asked what they felt was missing from their lives and the predominant answer from the two groups of professional women was time, but for the housewives it was challenge and creative involvement. The single women, in this study as in others (Simon, Clark & Galway, 1970), held higher professorial ranks than the married professionals. Both professional groups indicated high self-esteem and a sense of competence, but the single women were lonelier and somewhat less comfortable in their social relationships.

The data indicate then that the woman who has combined a career with marriage and children has not pursued her career with the total undeviating involvement that has characterized men and single women. She has, in many cases, withdrawn from full career commitments when her children were young, returning to these commitments as they matured (Astin, 1969; Feldman, 1971; Ginzberg, 1971). Her life has had more variety; growing old has not meant a simple diminution of her powers, but instead she has experienced greater flexibility in responding to the various possibilities that life offers at different stages in the life cycle. This may seem a waste from the standpoint of a society oriented exclusively to productivity in work, but to many it seems a more fulfilling life. I am not even sure that it is a waste in terms of the criterion of productivity, for the woman with the combined roles may retain an enthusiasm and creativity in her work even in her very mature years--her fifties and sixties--when many men who have constantly pursued their careers become bored, stagnant, and bureaucratized.

In turning now to the major focus of this presentation--the effects of the mother's professional role on the child--there is a remarkable

lack of data. In part this is a methodological problem. Studies that have examined the effects of maternal employment on the child usually locate a group of children around the same age, half of whom have employed mothers and half of whom do not, and compare the two groups. Since over half the mothers whose youngest child is in school are employed, finding these groups is no great problem. But to find a group of children of the same age whose mothers have professions is obviously more difficult, and there are few such studies. We will have to rely on studies that have compared employed and nonemployed mothers' children among the highly educated or middle class. This can be supplemented with investigations that have questioned professional mothers but have not obtained direct data on the children.

Ten years ago I published with Ivan Nye a book on the working mother. The working mother had been considered quite a devil and a great deal of the research reported in the book had originally been undertaken in the hope of documenting the ill effects of maternal employment. But the data simply would not cooperate. Examined as a general phenomenon, the standard study with adequate controls yielded no significant differences between the children of working and nonworking women. That should not have been a surprise. Maternal employment is too heterogeneous a variable to study. To see the effects we have to break it down, for the effects will be different in the working class than in the middle class. They will be different if the mother works out of necessity than if she works out of choice. The effects will be different for young children than for older, for girls than for boys. The hours she works, her child care and household arrangements, her attitudes about her role, all will be important. But even those studies that introduced such breakdowns found few negative effects and several positive ones. There was one study that suggested a bit of caution however.

This was a study that I did of working mothers of elementary school age children. The working mothers were divided into those who liked their work and those who did not. Each was compared to a nonworking mother family that was matched with respect to social class, size of family, and other pertinent factors. As you can guess, the women who liked their work were more typically--though not exclusively--the middle class and better ed-

ucated. The results indicated that when the working mother liked her work she often seemed to feel guilty and she compensated for her employment to such an extent that she may have even gone too far. For example, her children helped LESS around the house than did the children of the nonworking mothers. There was much in her relationship with her children that was very positive--she expressed more positive affect, used less coercive discipline, she felt less hostility toward her children and more empathy--but in many cases she was somewhat over indulgent and the children reflected this in their peer interactions and school performance. They played more with younger children than with their age mates, they were less likely to initiate interaction with their classmates, their academic performance was not up to par. These are almost the only negative effects of maternal employment found in the middle class to date, and they appear to result not from employment per se but from guilt about employment. This pattern was not extreme and it was not found in a study of working mothers with adolescent children. It is important, however, because it indicates it may not be employment you have to worry about, but guilt about employment.

With the exception of the finding just mentioned there is little evidence that maternal employment has a negative effect, and considerable support for the idea that it has a positive effect--particularly on girls. The daughters of working mothers are more likely to choose their mothers as models and as the person they most admire. Adolescent daughters of working mothers, particularly in the middle and upper socio-economic groups, have been found to be active, autonomous, girls who admire their mothers but are not unusually close-tied to them. For girls of all ages, having a working mother contributes to a concept of the female role which includes less restriction and a wider range of activities, and a self-concept which incorporates these aspects of the female role. They usually approve of maternal employment, plan to work when they grow up and become mothers, and, if they are old enough, they are more often employed themselves (Nye & Hoffman, 1963).

A few years ago a study by Goldberg (1967) indicated that undergraduate women tended to undervalue journal articles when authorship was attributed to women. Recently Grace Baruch (1972) replicated this study. She found

that the tendency to undervalue the works attributed to women was less than in the earlier study, and that the daughters of working mothers showed no such tendency. That is, the daughters of working mothers, unlike those of nonworking mothers, did not assume that women were less competent than men. In this study, the college women who wanted to combine motherhood with a career most often came from homes in which mothers had successfully combined the two roles. But simply having a mother who was employed was enough to affect the daughter's judgment about the competence of women--and this, of course, implies a positive effect on her self-concept.

If we focus on the daughter's academic and career achievements, we find further evidence of the positive effects of having a professional mother. A number of investigations have found that highly achieving women, and women who aspire to careers and particularly to less conventionally feminine careers, are more likely to be the daughters of educated women, and the daughters of employed women (Almquist and Angrist, 1971; Birnbaum, 1971; Levine, 1968; Tangri, 1969)[1]. The high achieving woman has a high achieving daughter. There are several reasons why this may be the case. Various studies suggest that the optimal conditions for a high achieving female include the presence of a model--and the model of the professional woman is more relevant to academic and achievement goals than is that of the nonemployed housewife. The optimal conditions for achievement also include independence training, which is particularly important because many girls are handicapped by overprotection and encouragement of dependency. And finally optimal conditons include a good relationship with a father who encourages the girl's independence and achievement while accepting her as a female (Ginzberg, 1971; Hoffman, 1972). All of these conditions are more likely to exist in the family with a professional mother.

Nor is this simply conjecture. We have already discussed the professional mother as model. Regarding the encouragement of independence,

[1]Birnbaum's married professional women are themselves the daughters of educated, employed women. However, the pattern for single professionals is somewhat different as indicated in both Birnbaum's data and Astin's (1969).

BS 002121

the study by Birnbaum mentioned earlier compared the two groups of mothers--professional women and intelligent nonworking housewives--with respect to their attitudes about their children. The professional mothers indicated pleasure in the child's growing independence. For the nonworking mothers, on the other hand, the child's movement toward independence was disturbing, perhaps because their own importance diminished as the child needed them less. Overprotection by the nonworking mothers was also suggested by the fact that they seemed to worry excessively about their children's health and safety, and they stressed self-sacrifice as a major aspect of motherhood.

With respect to the last-named factor that contributes to the development of achievement orientations in women--having a close relationship with an encouraging and supportive father--there are data also. Many studies have found that the husbands of working women are more actively involved in the care of the children and other studies show that the active involvement of the father has a positive effect on both male and female children. Furthermore, the data indicate that the husbands of professional women are more likely to respect competence and achievement in women (Dizard, 1968; Garland, 1972; Maccoby, 1966; Nye & Hoffman, 1963; Rapoport & Rapoport, 1972).

There is very little else by way of solid data that differentiates the children of professional from nonprofessional mothers. For example, I have not discussed the effects on sons simply because we have not discovered these effects as yet.

There are, however, some hints about possible effects from the studies that have compared professional mothers to able women who are full time housewives. Several studies, for example, have indicated that the woman who does well in college but does not pursue a career pins her achievement needs onto her children--seeking vicarious satisfaction through their achievements (Birnbaum, 1971 Tangri, 1969). Although her achievement frustrations are not great when her children are young, they tend to increase after a few years (Veroff and Feld, 1970). The data indicate that about twelve years or so after marriage[2] her need for achievement rises;

[2]More specifically, about fifteen years after college graduation.

her self-esteem is low; her feeling of self-sacrifice is high; she is prone toward depression; she worries about her competence in general and particularly as a mother, she is very anxious about her children and guilty about occasional losses of her self-control (Baruch, 1967; Birnbaum, 1971, Chessler, 1972). Despite her eagerness for her children to achieve, she is, as already pointed out, ambivalent about their growing independence. Surely this situation--the plight of the bright, nonprofessional mother when her children have reached school age--does not seem conducive to rearing healthy, competent children of either sex. When the professional mother is feeling harassed and guilty about her employment, she might consider what is the alternative.

We do not have data on the effects on the child of the various career patterns that professional women have chosen. How important, for example, is the fact that so many professional women have reduced their work load when the children were young? Is the prevalence of this pattern one of the reasons why maternal employment has not been found to have adverse effects? What indeed is the effect of the mother's career pursuits on the very young child? We simply do not know. Those who oppose professions for mothers are quick to generalize from the studies of maternal deprivation showing that infants reared in inadequate institutions without any stable one-to-one relationship with an adult, suffer serious affective and cognitive deficits. These early and important studies, however, do not provide automatic condemnation of day care centers, various alternative foster care arrangements, or even of institutional care itself if the institution is appropriately set up. Research suggests, for example, that putting a small number of babies in the attentive care of a single person mitigates many of the adverse effects. So does increasing the stimulation potential of the physical environment. In any case, the connection between the sterile understaffed institutional environment and the setting provided by the professional mother seems remote to me.

On the other hand, we do not know what the effects of the mother's career are on the very young child or what the effects are of the various possible child care arrangements. No one has studied them.

And now, if you feel I have painted a bleak picture of the state of our knowledge about the effects of the mother's career on her child let me

add still further to that impression: for much that we know may be made obsolete by the recent changes in sex role prescriptions.

The existing research--such as it is--is for the most part based on women who have been married about fifteen years or more. We had our babies during the time well characterized by the term, The Feminine Mystique. From the mid-forties until recently, large families were desired and motherhood was extolled as woman's major role whether she was a professional or not. Freudian theory, or at least the emphasis on the crucial importance of the mother in molding the personality of her child, was at its peak and the Bowlby and Spitz views on maternal deprivation added a shocking imperative to the mother's presence. This may have made those of us who pursued careers feel guilty, but it may have also altered us to compensatory responses that had a very positive effect on our children's development. Thus if the data show, and I think that on the whole they do, that we have done quite well as mothers, maybe it is because we tried extra hard.

On the other hand, we were harassed! Not content with being professionals and mothers we wanted to be gourmet cooks, hostesses, supportive wives, and femme fatales. The major problem reported by the professional woman in several studies has been the management of the household. The difficulty of finding a housekeeper really was the single most predominant complaint of the women Ph.D's studied by Astin. And our husbands may have helped more than the husbands of the nonworking women but by no means was there equal responsibility for housework and child care (Garland, 1972, Poloma, 1972).

Much in this situation has changed in recent years, however, and it is only with great caution that we can generalize from the existing data to the case for the new career women. For one thing, there will be more of them. Data collected each year on incoming freshmen at several colleges and universities show a continual increase in the percentage of women planning to combine careers and motherhood (Cross, 1971 University Record, 1972). These younger women who will pursue careers may be quite different in values, self-concepts, and expectations.

If they marry, they will very likely marry a different kind of man than any we might have married--one for whom achievement and career lines are much less central. When Horner did her research in 1965 on the motive to

avoid success, this motive characterized women but not men. In an exact replication, at the same school, we found just six years later that men were as likely as women to show evidence of a motive to avoid success. The percentage of men showing this motive had increased from 8% in 1965 to 78% in 1971. The dynamics of this motive in men is probably very different from what it is in women, but the finding does reflect a real change in men's orientations toward academic and career goals. We older women often gave our husbands' careers precedence over ours in part because we felt it was a more intrinsic part of his self-concept. College men today are very different in this respect. This may augur well for the young woman who wishes to combine the mother and professional roles. The true sharing of household tasks, child care, and career commitment by man and wife may well be a viable possibility, whereas this has been only rarely the case up until now (Garland, 1972; Poloma, 1972, Rapoport and Rapoport, 1972). Furthermore, if these women do become mothers, the styles of mothering may also have changed. Child care centers may be more available and more acceptable. The pattern of women interrupting their careers for the early child rearing years may diminish.

Finally, not marrying and not having children may be more psychologically available options than they used to be. In a recent study at the University of Michigan we found ten percent of the undergraduate women said they wanted no children[3] and the same percentage was found by Lozoff (1972) at Stanford. This is not a high percentage, but it is considerably higher than previous comparable figures.

These changes must be kept in mind when we consider the data on the professional woman as mother. Very likely it will be easier to combine the two roles, for there will be more social acceptance and institutional supports for doing so. Earlier I indicated that balancing a career commitment with family and affective concerns has resulted for many of us in a

[3]These figures are higher if we include those who said they only wanted adopted children.

richer and more fulfilling life. I think the possibility of achieving such a balance will be greater for the young professional woman of the near future, and for her husband as well. Needless to say, the lives of many men would also be enriched if they too had combined roles.

References

Almquist, E. M. and Angrist, S. S. Role model influences on college women's career aspirations. Merrill-Palmer Quarterly, Vol. 17, No. 3, 1971.

Astin, H. S. The woman doctorate in America. New York: The Russell Sage Foundation, 1969.

Bailyn, L. Notes on the role of choice in the psychology of professional women. Daedalus, Spring 1964, 700-710.

Baruch, G. K. Maternal influences upon college women's attitudes toward women and work. Developmental Psychology, 6 (1), 1972, 32-37.

Baruch, R. The achievement motive in women: Implications for career development. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1967, 5 (3), 260-267.

Birnbaum, J. A. Life patterns, personality style and self-esteem in gifted family oriented and career committed women. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Michigan, 1971.

Chessler, P. Women and mental illness. A paper presented at "Women: Resource for a Changing World," The Conference sponsored by Radcliffe Institute, Radcliffe College, Cambridge, Massachusetts, April 17-18, 1972.

Cross, K. P. Beyond the open door. San Francisco. Jassey-Bass, Inc., 1971.

Dizard, J. Social change in the family. Community and Family Study Center, University of Chicago, 1968.

Epstein, C. F. Woman's place: Options and limits in professional careers. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970.

Feldman, S. D. Girls stay away from the boys: Marital status and graduate education. A paper presented at 1971 Meetings: Pacific Sociological Association, Honolulu, Hawaii.

Garland, T. N. The better half? The male in the dual profession family. In Constantina Safilios-Rothschild (Ed.), Toward a sociology of women. Lexington, Mass.: Xerox College Publishing, 1972.

Ginzberg, E. Educated American Women: Life styles and self-portraits. Paperback. New York: Columbia University Press, 1971.

Goldberg, P. Misogyny and the college girl. Paper presented at the meeting of the Eastern Psychological Association, Boston, Mass., April, 1967.

Hoffman, L. W. Early childhood experiences and women's achievement motives. Journal of Social Issues, 1972, 28, 2, 1972, 129-156.

Horner, M. S. Sex differences in achievement motivation and performance in competitive and non-competitive situations. Doctoral dissertation, Univeristy of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms, 1968.

Lozoff, M. M. Changing life styles and role perceptions of men and women students. A paper presented at "Women: Resource for a Changing World." The Conference sponsored by Radcliffe Institute, Radcliffe College, Cambridge, Massachusetts, April 17-18, 1972.

Maccoby, E. E. Sex differences in intellectual functioning. In E. E. Maccoby (Ed.), The development of sex differences. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1966.

Nye, F. and Hoffman, L. W. The employed mother in America. Chicago: Rand McNally, 1963.

Poloma, M. M. Role conflict and the married professional woman. In Constantina Safilios-Rothschild (Ed.), Toward a sociology of women. Lexington, Massachusetts: Xerox College Publishing, 1972.

Rapoport, R and Rapoport, R. The dual-career family: A variant pattern and social change. In Constantina Safilios-Rothschild (Ed.), Toward a sociology of women. Lexington, Massachusetts: Xerox College Publishing, 1972.

Rossi, A. Assessing women's history: Our feminist predecessors. Paper presented at Center for Continuing Education of Women, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Oct. 19, 1971.

Simon, R. J., Clark, S. M. and Galway, K. The woman Ph.D.: A recent profile. In E. Milner (Ed.), The impact of fertility limitation on women's life career and personality, Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences, Vol. 175, No. 3, 1970.

Tangri, S. S. Role innovation in occupational choice. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Michigan, 1969.

University Record, ACE on 'typical' freshman--M. Frosh: Still ambitious but success not utmost. University of MIchigan publication, April 3, 1972, P. 3.

Veroff, J. and Feld, S. Marriage and work in America. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Co. 1970.

White, M. S. Psychological and social barriers to women in science. Science, Vol. 170, Oct., 1970.